

Q&A Live: Seeking Common Ground with Muslim Communities

When: Wednesday July 30, 2008 at 10:30 EDT

Guests:



[Sada Cumber](#)

Moderated By: [Mallory Kirsh \(Moderator\)](#)

Description: Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), **Mr. Sada Cumber**, joined us live on **July 30, 2008 from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. (15:30 to 16:30 GMT)** to discuss the relationship between the United States and this important international organization. His main role as envoy is “to promote mutual understanding and dialogue between the United States and Muslim communities around the world.”

The OIC is the **second largest intergovernmental organization** after the United Nations with a membership of 57 states covering four continents. As the **collective voice of the Muslim world**, the Organization works with the UN and other inter-governmental organizations to protect the interests of the Muslims and to settle conflicts or challenges among member states. The OIC supports the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting peace and harmony among various peoples of the world. It seeks to eliminate discrimination against Muslims in all forms.

Among the topics discussed included the **initiatives that Mr. Cumber and the U.S. government are working on with the OIC**, the ways in which international economic development can advance an exchange of ideas among the world’s religious communities, and the role of the OIC within the context of the United States’ interests in the Muslim world.

C	Welcome State Alumni members to our Q&A Webchat: Seeking Common Ground with Muslim Communities! We are honored to have Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Sada Cumber join us for this important
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	<p>conversation. The Special Envoy is reviewing your questions now, and we will begin momentarily.</p> <p><i>Moderator</i></p>
C	<p>Good morning. I am really happy to be joining you this morning, chatting and responding to some of your inquiries. So I encourage you to please go ahead and engage and I am happy to respond.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
Q	<p>The United States government has appointed you as special envoy to the OIC with the objective "to promote mutual understanding and dialogue between the United States and Muslim communities around the world." The question arises how effectively the interaction between the U.S. and the OIC could foster understanding between U.S. and the Muslim societies, keeping in view that the OIC is a fractured representative of mostly autocrat governments in the Muslim World, most of them, even otherwise, are on very good terms with the U.S. The resentment against the United States mostly prevails amongst the masses in the Muslim countries, which are not represented by their respective dictatorial and autocratic governments. These masses are as discontented with their governments as with the U.S. In these circumstances, isn't it an exercise in futility and unnecessary expenditure to work with an ineffective organization like the OIC?</p> <p><i>Muhammad from Pakistan</i> <i>Study of the U.S Institutes, 2007</i></p>
A	<p>Thank you very much for your question. President Bush is deeply engaged in an effort to broaden and strengthen U.S. interaction with an understanding of Muslim communities, wherever they are. My appointment was an element of that engagement. While the OIC is obviously not a perfect organization, the choice to engage more formally with it is rooted in the U.S. desire for increased positive interaction with not only the 56 Islamic member states of the OIC, but all Muslims around the world. I believe there is a great deal of good that can be done by reaching out to these Muslim communities both through the OIC and in the member states. The United States is committed to using all available avenues to advance the cause of freedom, justice, and democracy for Muslim and non-Muslim communities alike.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
Q	<p>I am from Tajikistan. Not too long ago (2004) there arose a new Islamic group called "Salafies." This group is a danger for Tajik Islamic society, because they are performing "fitna." In the press I have read that the United States and the United Kingdom are financing this organization. Why would they be giving money to them? Isn't this act equal to helping terrorism in the world, which is against the United States' political stance?</p> <p><i>Asadullo from Tajikistan</i> <i>Regional Scholars Exchange Program, 1999-2000</i></p>

A	<p>Asadullo, thank you very much for this very important question. As you and I understand, Islam is a faith of tolerance, hope, and intellect and it is important that issues like spreading of "fitna" is not allowed or encouraged in Islam. The U.S. government will never support or encourage any of these groups that represent a rigid Islam. If you look at the core values and the pure ethics of America, then you will realize and understand that Americans, all of us, including 5 million Muslims, support Islam, which encourages tolerance and good ethics.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
Q	<p>Dear Mr. Cumber,</p> <p>It's a pleasure to consult with you online. I've been working on a research project about American Muslims; I'd like to have some information about American Muslims overall involvement in the OIC activities and the OIC's efforts in helping them to improve their welfare and rights. Thank you for your time and look forward to your response. Best regards.</p> <p>Sincerely, Ling</p> <p><i>Ling from China</i> <i>Study of the U.S. Institutes, 2006</i></p>
A	<p>Today we are over 5 million Muslims in America representing 80 different cultures and countries. We practice our faith very openly in over 1,200 mosques and our children and our families enjoy the quality of life and the lifestyle that is almost unmatched. Our children go to the best schools and the reason being is that in the U.S., we enjoy and live in a free society where the government gives its people good governance, access to justice, rule of law, a strong civil society, higher education, accountability and transparency. And I truly believe that more than democracy or freedom or liberty, all the above values and privileges are part of basic human rights, which I believe every Muslim living everywhere deserves to live a good life.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
Q	<p>What is really a jihad? A war or an intense religious feeling to better one's self?</p> <p><i>Victor from Cameroon</i> <i>Study of the U.S. Institutes, 2008</i></p>
A	<p>The latter.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
Q	<p>As we were aware, His Excellency King of Saudi Arabia initiated the Scientific Conference, which was devoted to problem of overcoming distrust between the Islamic world, the Western societies, and other societies. He has confidence that this is a serious problem. Among the Islamic Scholar participants, there were serious opponents to his position. As the same time in the Western World, the ideas of Sir Samuel Huntington in the Clash of Civilizations spread about the growing confrontation between the Islamic and Western World. In Western society</p>

	<p>there is a growing fear of the increasing Islamic societies who live in traditional western territories. In Islamic societies, having a grudge of “unfair” world construction is a growing trend which is leading to a “radical” solving of the problem. What could be the role of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in solving these problems? Do you think that Republicans or Democrats are able to soften the negative trends? Can these problems be solved at all?</p> <p><i>Miryakub from Uzbekistan</i> <i>Fulbright Visiting Scholar, 2001-2002</i></p>
A	<p>Dear Miryakub,</p> <p>I believe that the initiative by the king of Saudi Arabia to engage in interfaith dialogue is very encouraging. Our U.S. government encourages all interfaith dialogues, in fact, today in America every city and every state is engaged in these kinds of interfaith dialogues. I however feel that more than clash of civilizations, it is a clash of ignorance. The Muslims need to learn to appreciate other faiths, which are as articulated in the Koran "people of the book" and the West also needs to appreciate the true values of Islam, which are tolerance, respect for other beliefs, freedom to practice one's faith and freedom of speech.</p> <p>The OIC has always issued very strong statements condemning radicalization of Islam or of any Muslim societies. And in the U.S., we have also been observing that more people are looking at Islam as a faith that encourages its people to enjoy a quality of life and lifestyle that is common to all faiths.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
Q	<p>What steps are being taken to close the gap between the Muslim world and the U.S.; while it is believed that after occupying the Muslim countries of Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. is now planning on attacking Iran? It is also believed that the Palestine issue could not be resolved because the U.S. does not desire it, and instead they unduly support Israel.</p> <p><i>Raza from Pakistan</i> <i>East-West Center, 2006</i></p>
A	<p>Dear Raza,</p> <p>The U.S. engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan are purely to help. As President Bush has said "the U.S. is committed to bring peace, prosperity and stability to all people." Even today, the U.S. has presence in places like Japan, Turkey, South Korea, Germany and other Western European countries, and if you look at what the U.S. engagement has brought to those societies, for example their economic conditions, the quality of life, the governance, the social infrastructure, you would appreciate that.</p> <p>As far as Iran is concerned, the United States is engaged in the dialogue to seek diplomatic resolution. Iran is an important country in that region and for the stability of the region, it is important that all of us find a diplomatic resolution with Iran.</p>

	<i>Sada Cumber</i>
Q	<p>What are the initiatives that Mr. Cumber and the U.S. government are working on with the OIC? Also, do you think the biggest problem between the U.S. and the Muslim world are the religious differences? If it is, how do you deal with it? If not, then what is it?</p> <p><i>Aixue from China</i> <i>International Visitor Leadership Program, 1994</i></p>
A	<p>I am pursuing many avenues of cooperation with the OIC - avenues that I hope will further mutual understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. I have proposed to the OIC that it sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. to pursue collaborative activities in the areas of health, education, women's empowerment, and science/technology. The U.S. has so much to offer in all these fields, and is already engaged in many OIC member countries to support these issues.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
Q	<p>First of all, I would like to thank you very much for this opportunity. My name is Kamal from Morocco. As you know sir, we hear many bad things said about Islam around the world. How are we supposed to react? How can we improve our relationship with the western world? Thank you again.</p> <p><i>Kamal from Morocco</i> <i>English Access Microscholarship Program, 2006</i></p>
A	<p>Kamal, this is a very important question that you have raised. There are many misconceptions in the world about Muslims and non-Muslims. First, we must all accept that freedom of religion or belief is a fundamental right of every individual - a right which should never be arbitrarily abridged by any government. The United States discourages actions that are offensive to particular religious traditions, including Islam, but disagrees with the concept of "defamation of religions," as proposed by the OIC. The concept of "defamation of religions" threatens the right of individuals like you and I to disagree or criticize. That is our right to freedom of expression, which the United States takes to be a fundamental human right. Unfortunately, some countries have recently cited "defamation of religion" to justify limitations on the freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Free expression, not limited expression, is the answer to intolerant voices.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
C	<p>The topic of this Q&A Live at this time is questionable. It brings forward the idea that Muslim Communities live isolated far from the reality of the real life. It indicates that, as if, the Muslim communities live differently from the common human being in the earth. But of course, we cannot blame on others what they perceive about Muslim communities. The most important question we have is how to solve this gap? In my opinion, one thing we need to do is emphasize the similarities rather than the differences among all people in this universe. In every situation, among</p>

	<p>difference, there must be similarities. One possible similarity is by developing universal values that are applicable for all people on this earth regardless of their race, mother tongue, cultural background, nationality, and religion. I believe there must be universal values that are not debatable among us.</p> <p>Soeparto</p> <p><i>Soeparto from Indonesia</i> <i>International Visitor Leadership Program, 2004</i></p>
C	<p>Soeparto, thank you for your comments. I agree completely that we need to focus on our shared values. In my travels since assuming this position, I have been repeatedly struck by the fact that Muslim communities around the world share so many values. In addition, these are many of the same values shared by Americans. These shared values that I am talking about are respect for civil society, commitment to the rule of law, access to justice, human rights, prosperity, and peace. My interaction with the OIC has been very fruitful, very productive, in large part because we are speaking about the same aspirations and sharing similar perspectives.</p> <p>At the end of the day, we must rely upon our shared values to show us the path toward greater understanding and cooperation.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
C	<p>Please, rate the ratio of education Muslim women. It is very low. What should we do? This is a very dangerous thing for the world in terms of population, etc. In rural countries, please help women and fill them with the light of education.</p> <p><i>Sanjeev from India</i> <i>American Council of Young Political Leaders, 2001</i></p>
C	<p>Sanjeev, thank you very much for the comments. I completely agree that the advancement of women must be a priority for Muslim communities around the world. Islam has never discriminated the rights of women. This is a cultural baggage and nothing to do with our faith In the presence of Allah and in the prayers, both men and women are equal. As President Bush has said, the social oppression of women is a major barrier to progress. No society can succeed and prosper while denying basic rights and opportunities to the women of their country. I am convinced that by unlocking the enormous potential of women in these communities, great advancements can be made in mutual understanding and cooperation.</p> <p>Since women constitute at least half of the population of the Muslim world, they must be full partners in the future of those communities.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
Q	<p>How do we bridge the ever widening gap between the Christian and Muslim world?</p> <p><i>MURALIDHAR from India</i> <i>Educational Partnerships Program, 2007</i></p>
A	<p>Thank you, Muralidhar. You've asked an important and challenging question.</p>

	<p>I recently paid a visit to the Vatican, where I met with several senior advisors to Pope Benedict and discussed the Vatican's effort to energize the interfaith dialogue. I applaud the efforts being made by the Vatican to expand and extend dialogue between faiths. In a similar vein, Saudi King Abdullah has recently taken positive steps to promote interfaith dialogue. However, the United States would like to see these dialogues to be more inclusive where minorities within Islam and outside are invited to fully participate. In Islam Shia represent nearly 25% of the total Muslim population and yet they are consistently marginalized. We must never forget that one of the key tenants of Islam is to show tolerance and accept other beliefs. As we are all, as it is said in the Koran "people of the book."</p> <p>So, there is progress on several fronts. Ultimately, however, these efforts will only have lasting significance if they are as inclusive as possible. Minority faiths should not be excluded from such opportunities. Dialogue is crucially important.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
Q	<p>I think the United States of America, according to its considerable number of Muslim citizens, should apply to be an active member in the OIC. It is an organization not only for Muslim or Islamic countries in terms of shari'a, but instead it is an Islamic organization that aims to strengthen the various relationship of development between the countries where Muslims are in a considerable number. The membership of the U.S. in the OIC will surely contribute to development and understanding between the Muslim world and the western states. My question is, what should be the possible changes in political attitudes of the U.S. towards Palestine if the U.S. would become an active member of the OIC? Thanks!</p> <p><i>Diakhate from Senegal</i> <i>International Visitor Leadership Program, 2007</i></p>
A	<p>Diakhate – first and most crucially, the U.S. is fully and actively committed to a peaceful and permanent resolution to the Palestinian issue – a resolution that results in two independent states living side by side in peace and security. The OIC can and should play an important and constructive role in assisting the Palestinian Authority to advance reform and improved governance, and stimulating economic growth. As much of my hope today is that the Palestinian people and Israel should live side by side in peace, I am not too sure, or in fact I must say that the Palestinian people must prepare themselves for the day that they are responsible for their own future where rule of law, good governance, access to justice, strong civil society, higher education, accountability and transparency reigns.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
Q	<p>In my country, political leaders capitalize on the religious tensions to cause panic and mayhem. This results in the loss of life and property of innocent people (usually Christians but at times Muslims or other tribes). This has caused so much bad blood that most Christian southerners look at the northern Muslims with hatred. I know this is not true; I have friends who are different and know how their people are being manipulated. I was told that Islam is the religion of peace. If so, what is your organization doing about these leaders who are Muslim but use the religion as a</p>

	<p>means to foster violence?</p> <p><i>Stella from Nigeria</i> <i>Study of the U.S. Institutes, 2008</i></p>
A	<p>Stella –</p> <p>I can't speak for the OIC, but I agree with you that there is no place for violence and intolerance between peoples and faiths. Part of my role as Special Envoy is to promote tolerance, understanding, and collaboration.</p> <p>It is my hope that the OIC will combat all forms of violence that occur within the borders of its member states in order to create and maintain a peaceful environment where tolerance and understanding are embraced.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
C	<p>Good day! I'm a 2006 alumna of the FLEX Program (it's a great program). During my exchange in the U.S., I did 86 presentations about my native country – Republic of Uzbekistan. I've done my presentation in different communities, clubs, schools, and in houses of different people (because they were interested). Anyway, the most common thing and the most common questions was always the same. When I would say that about 80% of the Uzbek population is Muslim; I would be asked "Are you a terrorist?" or "So, do you have many acts of terror in your country?" Of course I understood them perfectly, but I think that the reason they were asking these questions was because of the lack of information about Islam and the Muslim world. I don't mean that there should be propaganda about Islam, I mean that maybe there should be more programs to help people learn about other cultures. Particularly in this time, there should be more programs about religion and tolerance.</p> <p>With best wishes</p> <p>- Tahmina. Alumni 2006, FLEX</p> <p><i>Tahmina from Uzbekistan</i> <i>Future Leaders Exchange Program, 2005-2006</i></p>
C	<p>Thanks Tahmina - I agree completely that exchange programs such as the one you participated in are of tremendous value. We in the U.S. are very proud of the Fulbright program and the other exchange opportunities, which build connections between people, cultures, and schools of thought. As you suggest, the better we understand one another, the less likely we will be having discussions about terrorism and intolerance.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
Q	<p>Could you tell us how the U.S. can contribute in making the "10 year plan of OIC" be more functional and successful?</p> <p><i>Huseyin from Turkey</i> <i>Study of the U.S. Institutes, 2007</i></p>
A	<p>Dear Huseyin,</p> <p>The United States government in fact has presented an MOU to the OIC, which is part of the OIC ten-year program. We would like to work in the areas of</p>

	<p>education, science and technology, enhancement of the status of women, health and governance sectors.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
Q	<p>Hello. I am 17 years old. I am an Access student at Sibawaih School in Algeria. I would like to ask you a question: What kind of relationship do the U.S. and the O.I.C have?</p> <p><i>Hassiba from Algeria</i> <i>English Access Microscholarship Program, 2007-2008</i></p>
A	<p>Dear Hassiba,</p> <p>Thank you for the question. This is in fact an exciting time for the U.S. and OIC as our relationship is evolving quickly. As you know, I am the first U.S. special envoy to the OIC, and as such am charting a new path for our interaction with this important organization. It is my intent to create new and lasting linkages for which I have already traveled to over twenty countries in the past four months and am looking forward to visiting more capitols of the fifty-seven member countries of the OIC to learn more about how our relationship can expand.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
Q	<p>Do you think that educating Muslims on the peaceful message of their religion is as important as educating the rest of the world on what Islam advocates? If the answer is yes, does the OIC participate in funding or producing school curricula on the subject?</p> <p><i>Asma from Sudan</i> <i>Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program, 1992-1993</i></p>
A	<p>Dear Asma,</p> <p>Thank you for the question. I agree that educating members of all faiths on peace and tolerance is critical to advancing not only global peace, but also mutual understanding.</p> <p>The OIC does in fact have an ongoing effort to promote peace and tolerance messages through schools in member states and I fully support that effort and will look for ways in which I can support them.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
Q	<p>Mr. Sada Cumber,</p> <p>What do you think is the formula to contribute to the eradication of discrimination against the Muslim culture? Do you think that the governments and peoples of north, central, and south America should support and encourage initiatives to publicize the truth about the Muslim culture? Could you make known some of the immediate projects that this government will implement to curb discrimination against Muslim women and men? How do you encourage people give the Muslim people and culture the respect they deserve?</p>

	<p>Thank you for your response.</p> <p><i>Yelitza from Venezuela</i> <i>International Visitor Leadership Program, 2005</i></p>
A	<p>Dear Yelitza,</p> <p>Thank you for the question. Today we have over 5 million Muslims in America living in peace and enjoying prosperity and a great lifestyle. We freely practice our faith in over 1,200 mosques and are enjoying economic growth. Our children are attending the best schools. A free society like America has presented a good model for the rest of the world to look at and emulate as appropriate.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
Q	<p>Hello,</p> <p>It is an important question in Kyrgyzstan where freedom of meeting for Protestants has been prohibited because the authorities think the Protestant sects are spoiling the Muslims. What do you think the Protestant minorities should do, with their rights being oppressed?</p> <p><i>Askarbek from Kyrgyz Republic</i> <i>Muskie, Edmund S. Graduate Fellowship Program , 2002-2004</i></p>
A	<p>Thank you Askarbek for your question. Underlining all of my interactions as a special envoy is my firm belief and a core tenant of U.S. democracy, which is that tolerance for all should define a free society, typified by rule of law, good governance and tolerance of all faiths. I anticipate traveling to Kyrgyzstan soon and look forward to discussing these same issues with religious and governmental leaders.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
Q	<p>I congratulate Mr. Sada Cumber for his initiative to enhance relationship with United States and Muslim countries.</p> <p>I would like to know-</p> <p>How could the tormented relationship of the U.S. and Muslim countries be normalized if the U.S. has a global foreign policy that is antagonistic to the Muslim world?</p> <p><i>MOHAMMAD from Bangladesh</i> <i>International Visitor Leadership Program, 2007</i></p>
A	<p>Dear Mohammad,</p> <p>Thank you for your question. I have to disagree with you regarding your characterization of our relationship with the Muslim world as "tormented," because we are five million of us Muslims living a great life under an open and free society. We envision the same rights and privileges for Muslims around the world, and our foreign policy is designed to advance that goal.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
C	<p>My name is Lucien. I am an International Visitor to the U.S. and I am pleased that</p>

	<p>you have given me the opportunity to bring my question or comment to this important subject. We Muslim individuals living in Muslim countries should start acting like true Muslims, which means living with virtue and open mindedness. We need to offer to the world and our fellow human beings our participation in all fields of human creativeness. We should take into consideration that the U.S. is the only country in the world which accepts people from different backgrounds. Further, the U.S. makes foreigners American citizens without any consideration of their faith. We need to love with all our heart so we will not lag behind.</p> <p><i>Lucien from Senegal</i> <i>International Visitor Leadership Program, 2004</i></p>
C	Thank you for your comment. <i>Sada Cumber</i>
Q	<p>The OIC is planning to develop the cultural relations and understanding in Muslim countries. Science and history professors, sociologists, and cultural experts contribute very much to this development. From what I have learned from Middle Eastern politicians, they would like to develop cultural relations with the U.S., or image relations. But you, Mr. Cumber, stand out with your business skills when you are searched about on the internet. So could you please tell us, how are you planning to contribute to this development through economic relations?</p> <p><i>Huseyin from Turkey</i> <i>Study of the U.S. Institutes, 2007</i></p>
A	<p>Dear Huseyin,</p> <p>Thank you for your question. I could not agree with you more about your questions regarding social development. However, I also want to emphasize as you have suggested based on my background that for societies to be successful, it is imperative that all people should enjoy a prosperous lifestyle and quality of life wherever they live. And for which, it is important that we have a growing economy and there are some good examples, such as Malaysia, which forty years back was a agriculture economy and today it has turned into a high paying export economy. Many of the Muslim countries need to concentrate on several economic models which countries should take advantage of their geographic situation. A good example of that is Dubai, who is taking advantage of its large port creating a hub for export and tourist economy.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
C	<p>Thank you very much for your great questions. I wish we had more time to discuss these issues further. I hope to have more opportunities like this in the future, as I believe this is a valuable forum to creating a common understanding and cooperation. We see tremendous opportunities to work together.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
C	<p>Thank you, Special Envoy Sada Cumber for participating in today's Q&A Webchat and thank you alumni for your many thoughtful questions and comments. It has truly been an honor to speak with you on these very important and timely topics!</p>

	<i>Moderator</i>
C	<p>Hello Alumni! Despite having run out of time during this Webchat yesterday, Special Envoy Sada Cumber felt this was a meaningful discussion and therefore decided to address a few additional questions and comments that were received. They are as follows:</p> <p><i>Moderator</i></p>
Q	<p>One of the challenges that await any U.S. diplomat in the Muslim world might be that of mediating between what I would call “friends” in “enemy” states and “enemies” in “friendly” states. For perceptive observers of the relationship between the U.S. and members of the OIC, both categories are products of the U.S. foreign policy and diplomacy. My question to the U.S. envoy to the OIC is as follows: In balancing the scale between the two categories, how does the envoy intend to impact/influence the activities of the State Department such that the gulf between cultural and political/economic activities might be better bridged?</p> <p>Thanks, Fulbright Scholar, 2006, Fellow, African Scholar Program</p> <p><i>Afis from Nigeria</i> <i>Fulbright Visiting Scholar, 2006-2007</i></p>
A	<p>Afis – thanks for the question. Bridging the gap between the U.S. and Muslim communities is precisely my mandate and my challenge. To be frank, however, the U.S. already does a great deal in that regard, and I am convinced that this gap is narrowing rapidly.</p> <p>Interfaith dialogue is something we in America take for granted. In the U.S., that kind of interaction is constant and enormously beneficial to maintaining the climate of tolerance and understanding, which facilitates collaboration on cultural, political and economic activities.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
Q	<p>Excellency, This is Tanbir from Bangladesh. Isn't it true that the U.S. has been applying different strategic roles with different Islamic countries? If so, then how can the “Common Ground with Muslim Communities” be achieved?</p> <p><i>Tanbir from Bangladesh</i> <i>International Visitor Leadership Program, 2004</i></p>
A	<p>Tanbir, thank you very much for your great question. You are quite right, Muslim communities around the world are different, their concerns are often different, and their aspirations are sometimes different.</p> <p>However, there are synergies that unite Muslim communities. While we may come from different backgrounds, from different traditions, we are united in the core tenets of the faith, and must embrace what brings us together, not what pulls us apart.</p>

	<p>I believe the U.S. provides an excellent model in that regard. As I'm sure you know, there are more than 5 million Muslims in America, from over 80 different ethnic backgrounds. Not only do Muslim Americans live and work in harmony together, we live and work in harmony with all Americans.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
C	<p>While I was in Honolulu for East West Center degree study, once during a religious festival of ours, I invited my professor and decided to greet him the way I would greet my father on that special day. He agreed to attend. Later, I found out that in order to prepare himself for the festival he went to the library to learn about Islam and the special day. This surprised me very much. But many other surprises awaited me while living in the States. Americans and the entire Western world know so little about Islam. During my childhood, when we had religious education at home we learnt about Moses and Jesus and all other common prophets, and so we felt close to the Christian and the Jews. Because of this, their ignorance regarding Islam really surprised me and their lack of interest offended me. I firmly believe that if the non-Muslim could take that small step to become religiously literate, it would help the relationship tremendously and it would build universal understanding and peace. Thanks,</p> <p>Nazma (Dhaka, Bangladesh)</p>
C	<p>Nazma – you make a valid point here, and I would extend that point by suggesting that we can all do better, Muslim, Christian, Hindu, etc. The truth that the United States is a nation of peace, of tolerance, of faith and optimism, has not always been transmitted well, leaving some Muslims with misperceptions of my country. There are misperceptions of Muslim communities here in America as well. This is a perfect example of the need for greater awareness of our shared values. An understanding of our differences, but the embrace of our similarities is what will build a strong bond.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
Q	<p>After the events of September 11th, the United States and Muslim Communities became isolated within themselves. How does the OIC intend to convince both parties to renew their dedication to global economic development and to create a degree of confidence between them once again?</p> <p><i>Asma from Morocco</i> <i>Near East & South Asia Undergraduate Exchange Program, 2008-2009</i></p>
A	<p>Asma – excellent question. You have clearly articulated my goal as Special Envoy. While I can not speak for the OIC, it is my intent to work closely with that organization to build confidence and interaction, and lay the groundwork for closer economic, social, and cultural ties. It is very important for Muslims and non-Muslims alike to work together in order to enhance global economic development in order for shared prosperity to be cultivated and continued.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
C	<p>Hello, I am an Access student at Sibawait. I want to know more about the OIC</p>

	<p>because it is very interesting for me. Thanks a lot. Yours faithfully</p> <p><i>Hadjer from Algeria</i> <i>English Access Microscholarship, 2007-2009</i></p>
C	<p>Thank you so much for your comment, and thank you to all the other students who expressed interest in further information about the OIC. If you would like to learn more about the OIC, I would encourage you to go to the organization's website: http://www.oic-oci.org/oicnew/. This website would be a great resource to expand your knowledge of the OIC and how you can stay informed on the happenings at the OIC.</p> <p><i>Sada Cumber</i></p>
C	<p>Once again, I would like to thank our wonderful alumni and the Special Envoy for taking time out of your busy days to participate in this very important Q&A Webchat!</p> <p><i>Moderator</i></p>

Editor's Note: State Alumni moderators retain editorial control over Q&A Live online discussions and choose the most relevant questions for guests; guests may decline to answer questions.

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